25. Language-based approaches to names in literature

Literary onomastics is a relatively recent discipline, dealing with both personal names and place-names, though there is usually a more specific focus on one or the other depending on the literary work and the interests of the critic. This essay aims to give a brief historical overview of the deployment of literary onomastics as a linguistic methodology and literary technique in particularly earlier English literature.

25.1 Literary onomastics

It has been objected that literary onomastics it is too little like linguistics because it is 'the analysis of isolates' and '[t]here can be no continuity to literary onomastics, and no meaningful history that appeals to implication'. In short, as T.L. Markey sums up the argument just broached, '[o]ne cannot make a science of sensitivity' (Markey 1982: 134–5). W.F.H. Nicolaisen acknowledges the force of the 'analysis of isolates' point, noting that much early endeavour in the area reduced to 'the meaning of names in literary work X by author Y', without much reference beyond the work or author in question (Nicloaisen 2008: 90).[1] These objections might be countered by remarking that literary study is inescapably the study of isolates, that such isolates fall into patterns, and that onomastic approaches potentially add another dimension to understanding of the historical depth of literature and language. As both names and *hapax legomena* are conditioned by the linguistic inventory and imaginative resources of authors, they should also be included in linguistic and literary consideration. Indeed, the six volumes of the Cambridge *History of the English Language* include names as a significant strand of evidence for the study of language; and recent studies of the use of names in literary works are contributing to a greater understanding of the historical context, social conditions, generic expectations, and public reception of writing.

Another question is what a literary name is, and this hangs principally on whether such a name is 'made up' or 'real'. A further issue is whether genre (history, poetry, drama, letter) makes any difference to our perception of the literary effect of toponyms or anthroponyms. The difficulties, however, are more apparent than real. While it is true that some names offer more scope for predicting character and sparking word-play than others, it rarely depends on whether the name is fictitious or in imaginative literature. The disastrous reign of Æthelræd II, king of England 978–1016, was recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Later tradition plays on the meaning of the elements of the king's name, 'noble counsel', in calling him 'Ethelred the Unready', that is, 'ill-advised'. But even in the Chronicle account of his reign in the year 1011 there is a dry comment that 'all these misfortunes came upon us because of *unrædes*, bad counsel' (Plummer 1892–99: 141). A historical character's name prompts punning comment in a historical narrative. By the same token, when an author has a degree of freedom in choosing names, these can be used to good effect. Finknottle and Blandings (P.G. Wodehouse) or Maurice Zapp and Euphoric State University (David Lodge) clearly have comic potential even out of context.

One methodological approach which runs through literary onomastics is the division of literary names into 'Cratylic' and 'Hermogenean', from characters in Plato's dialogue *Cratylus*. For Cratylus, names are not merely patterned appellatives, but have meaning in the sense that they represent something important about the person or place. For Hermogenes, names are semantically empty, the conventional application of syllables to identify a person or place. Curtius analysed the types as 'natural' or 'speaking names' and 'conventional' names, and showed how Cratylic names worked in the Classical and Middle Ages: Odysseus is both the one against whom Zeus is angry (*ōdusao Zeu*) and the 'wrathful one' (*odussomenos*). Curtius sees the pattern develop as far as Dante and others (Curtius 1953: 495–500). Most literary onomastics studies since have used these categories. A sub-category

of Cratylic names is by-names: these are given with the specific purpose of identifying characteristics of the person (or place), but by-names are not always transparent, and even when transparent not always felicitous in literature. The by-name of a historical character in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,Thurcytel *Myran heafod* 'Mare's head' (Plummer 1892–99: 140), might be comic, scurrilous, or frightening if we only knew; and Hardy's Father Time in *Jude the Obscure* seems a little portentous.

25.2 Place-names and personal names

The composer of imaginative literature, early and late, has to negotiate the historical realities of naming in English (and in many other languages). The two principal features here are that place-names tend to be resolutely practical and personal names tend to be conventional or aspirational. Place-names tend to designate historically important features of a place, whether of settlement type or topography, ownership or position, though those denotations are quickly lost and overlaid with the accidental associations of history. In their nature place-names tend originally to be Cratylic: they were meaningful and as associations become attached to particular names over time, remain so. Personal names are Hermogenean: they are apparently random but tend to be given according to recognisable patterns which vary across the generations (Coates 2006). Certain personal names might be given in hope and 'lived up to',[2] but even the coincidence of surnames and occupation (Baker, Clark) or parentage (Stephenson's father being called Stephen) is relatively rare nowadays and might seem forced in literature. The comic potential of this coincidence is fully realised in the name of Major Major Major Major in *Catch-22*.

The negotiation that imaginative writers make is not infrequently to reverse this pattern of meaning, so that place-names become apparently random and bereft of particular associations attaching to a specific place, and personal names become meaningful and

relevant to the character. The result of this is that, so far, literary onomastics has generally focused more on personal names than toponyms. While many a piece of literature will explore and exploit locality, as, for example, Joyce does Dublin in *Ulysses*, many writers prefer to create rather than exploit existent place associations. Extreme examples of place-name 'dislocation' are Samuel Butler's Erewhon and Dylan Thomas's Llareggub, though Butler uses Erewhon for an unfamiliar, imaginary land and Thomas uses Llareggub to disguise a more immediately familiar and potentially recognisable place. Chaucer's Reeve describes two of the characters in his *Tale* thus:

> Of o toun were they born, that highte Strother,
>
> Fer in the north; I kan nat telle where. (Benson 1988: 86, lines 4014–5)

Chaucer probably knew that *strother* was not so much a 'toun', as a frequent element ('place overgrown with brushwood') in Northumberland and Durham minor place-names, places of no consequence. And while the action of the tale takes place at Trumpington near Cambridge, the young scholars who are the focus of the linguistic and slapstick comedy in the tale are merely 'northern'. Chaucer manages to satirise both the provincial miller of Trumpington with his bungled attempts at chicanery, and the students whose strange speech and place of origin mark them as outsiders, and who are indeed gullible 'northerners', but nevertheless clever enough to get the better of the miller.

25.3 Early literary onomastics

Early English literature inherited from the Bible and its early interpreters a way of understanding names that is essentially literary and Cratylic. The Bible is full of names which were reportedly given on the basis of etiology, for example, 'And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living' (Gen. 3: 20); 'And when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it

was called Marah ("bitter")' (Exo. 15: 23). The names of Abram and Sarai are changed, as is Saul's in the New Testament, to reflect changes in status, and in a play on the names, Naomi ('pleasant'), says, 'Call me not Naomi, call me Mara ('bitter'): for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me' (Ruth 1: 20).

A great wealth of name-lore grew from the Bible. Jerome laid the foundations for much of the literary onomastic invention of the Latin Middle Ages with his *Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum* which gave brief definitions of the Hebrew names of Scripture; and this was borrowed with some enthusiasm in Isidore of Seville's encyclopedia, the *Etymologiae,* and augmented by allegorical commentary throughout the medieval period. Jerome's 'Eva calamitas aut uae uel uita' (Jerome 1959: 65, 'Eve = calamity or woe or life') is repeated by Isidore 'Eve (*Eva*) means "life" or "calamity" or "woe" (*vae*). Life, because she was the origin of being born; calamity and woe because by her lying she was the cause of death — for "calamity" takes its name from "falling" (*cadere*)' (Barney et al. 2006: 162). Isidore had explained a few lines above this how Hebrew words are differently transliterated and hence susceptible to different interpretations, but took for granted understanding of the anagram that makes *Eva* into *vae* 'woe'. The writer also elides the fact that *calamitas* is etymologically unrelated to the text's *cadendo*. The point is that the names 'were imparted to them prophetically in such a way that they concord with their future or their previous conditions' (ibid. 162); and that concord could be expressed by sound (*ca*-), by letters or syllables (*Eva*, *vae*), and by association (Eve and The Fall). The Reformation was probably influential in bringing some of the more vividly imaginative linguistic and spiritual interpretations of names into desuetude but it might be noted that the 'Brief table of the interpretation of the propre names which are chiefly found in the olde Testame[n]t' in the Protestant Geneva Bible of 1560, though it omits Eve, includes the essential elements of

Jerome's 'Adam homo siue terrenus aut indigena uel terra rubra' in 'Adam man, earthlie, read ("red")' (Berry 2007).

One of the better-known early examples of this kind of linguistic interpretation of names is found in the tradition about Pope Gregory the Great and the English boys in the Roman market. Gregory asked to which race they belonged, the kingdom they came from and the name of their king, and interpreted the replies, 'Angles', 'Deira' and 'Ælle', spiritually as 'angels', *de ira* 'from wrath' and 'Alleluia'. Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History* remarks of Gregory's wit, as he retells the story, *adludens ad nomen*, that Gregory was 'playing on the name' (Colgrave and Mynors 1969: 132–5). Sound and meaning could be manipulated in pleasing punning which nevertheless reveals a deeper spiritual meaning. Anagrams and acrostics were particlularly popular in the early modern period (Camden 1674: 182), but solutions to Old English riddles include names of things in runes or Latin letters written in reverse order, for example *Riddles 19* and *23* (Muir 1994). A curious by-way in naming is the ancient and medieval tradition which takes the lack of names in the biblical tradition for various characters such as Noah's wife as licence to invent: Utley (1946) collects 103 names in various languages for Noah's wife.

These modes of interpretation informed the literary practice of early writers. Felix, in his *Life of Saint Guthlac*, the Latin hagiography of an early English saint, confusedly talks of the saint being named from his land or his tribe (respectively Prologue and chapter X, and neither pattern much noted from Anglo-Saxon England), before settling on the notion that the elements of Guthlac's name reflect divine inspiration because it means *belli munus* 'gift [*lac*] of war [*guth*]' and refers to the gift of victory promised to those who spiritually war against vices (Colgrave 1940: 76–9). Later in the *Life*, in chapter XVII, the saint in his secular youth is depicted as raiding and gathering great booty, but then returning a third of it to the victims in a frankly implausible gesture: the story is there to illustrate the interpretation of the name,

as Guthlac ‘gift of war’ gives a gift of war to his victims. Even in the longer of two Old English poems concerning the saint, which does not immediately depend on Felix’s *Life*, the thematic recurrence of war and gift has been noted, indicating that this Cratylic understanding of the name was widely known (Muir 1994, text; Robinson 1993: 206–12).

One of the principles of naming in the early Germanic world was that an alliterative theme was carried through from father to sons so that their names could be celebrated in alliterative verse (Stenton 2000). *Widsith* is the name of a long poem in Old English that lists the names of lords and tribes of the ancient Germanic world (and more widely), and scholarship has attempted, with some success, to locate and identify the tribes and persons listed (Malone 1962). This has lent credibility to the suggestion that the names represent the essential kernel of stories in the repertoire of the eponymous travelling poet. Another poem in the same manuscript, *Deor* (Muir 1994), is argued to show how this repertoire might come into play. The poem recounts the sufferings endured (or caused by) named men and women, Weland and the victim of his rape, Beaduhild, and others, before the poet tells his own story of suffering. The poet identifies himself, *dryhtne dyre, me wæs Deor noma* ‘dear to my lord, my name was Dear’ (37). The alliteration of the line picks out the adjectival and nominal forms of *deor* ‘dear’; but perhaps the most striking thing is the past tense *wæs*. The poet’s name was *Deor*: no longer dear to his lord, having been superseded as court poet by another, he has lost his name and some part of his identity. He recalls the names and identifies the stories of those who suffered, but fears that part of his suffering will be that his name will disappear—perhaps, in echo of the refrain of the poem, that his name will pass like the sufferings he records.

Some of the names in *Beowulf* have aroused controversy, especially those of Unferth, who needles Beowulf on his arrival at Heorot, Hygelac, Beowulf’s uncle, who dies on a speculative expedition to Frisia, and Grendel, the man-eating attacker of the Danes: their

names are interpreted as *unfrið* ‘discord’, *hygelæc* ‘lack of thought’ and related to grinding (respectively, among others) by some who see them as being named according to their nature (Fulk et al. 2008: 464–73, and references there cited). Though the details are debated, the Cratylic naming is not implausible, especially as the poet associates names and ideas across the length of the poem. The name of the hero, Beowulf, appears to mean ‘bee-wolf’ or bear: he fights Grendel without weapons, and late in the poem kills an opposing champion with a bear-hug. The first part of the poem is associated with a type of recurring folk-story known as the ‘Bear’s son folk-tale’. Heorot ‘hart’ is the name of Hrothgar’s hall, probably because the gables resemble the antlers of the deer; its gables are referred to as *hornas* ‘horns’, but it provides no defence against Grendel. When describing Grendel’s fearsome lake abode, the poet recounts that the ‘strong-horned hart’ (1369) will face the attacking hounds rather than seek refuge in its waters. The antipathy between Grendel and his human victims is subtly captured by the web of associations around the name and the animal. Another example of this associative play with names is the belated naming of Grendel’s victim from Beowulf’s party, Hondscio ‘glove’ (2076). We learn of the man’s name within ten lines of the mention of Grendel’s *glof* ‘glove’, in which he carried his victims back to his lair, and repeated reference to hands (*idelhende* ‘empty-handed’ 2081; *gearofolm* ‘with ready hand’ 2085). The poet’s audience might have winced as much as the modern reader does.

The other side of the naming coin is non-naming and anonymity. In *Beowulf*, Grendel’s mother is described in some detail, but has no name beyond her relationship to her son. The poet muses on, and sometimes almost forgets, her femininity; she is like Grendel, but more complex, more natural, almost more human; she is certainly more nearly successful against Beowulf than her son. The lack of a name hides her identity, and the narrative has to fill out the detail. Another Old English poem, *The Battle of Maldon*, reconstructs the events of a historical confrontation between an English army and a force of Vikings in 991 at

Maldon in Essex (Scragg 1991). Many of the English warriors are named, from the nobility to the lowest free man; part of the motivation for one of them, Leofsunu, in fighting on against the odds, is that he knows the gossip that circulates in the village of Sturmer, and does not wish, alive or dead, to be the butt of comments. The Vikings have an unnamed messenger who demands capitulation and tribute, and there is later a reported request for a position of advantage. They are an unindividuated mass like a pack of wolves; they have prowess without honour. The care that the poet takes in naming the English has enabled scholars to locate most of those named in documentary records. The English men who initiated the flight from the battle, Godric, Godwine and Godwig, the sons of Odda, however, have not been convincingly identified. The intriguing possibility is that the common occurrence of names like Godric makes these men effectively anonymous, or at least unidentifiable (Lockerbie-Cameron 1991: 245–6). Naming can disguise almost as well as non-naming.

In early literary onomastics it is clear that names are often interpreted as Cratylic, and that onomancy could be directed to both spiritual and secular ends. Etymology (including folk-etymology), name-riddles, anonymity and association of names and ideas are all deployed with skill and confidence.

25.4 The Middle English period

Dominant modes in Middle English literary onomastics are personification and allegory. These borrow at least in part from the exegetical traditions of early Christianity mentioned above, but also from two particular literary sources. In Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, the imprisoned sixth-century Roman writer discusses philosophical problems of suffering and free will with the personification of Philosophy in his dreams. The *Consolatio Philosophiae* was freely translated into Old English under King Alfred, and later also by Chaucer, but it was one of the focal philosophical studies of the Middle Ages. Prudentius, somewhat earlier

than Boethius, presents in his *Psychomachia* the struggle in the human soul between vice and virtue, with these named, personified, and articulating their individual values, Pride against Humility, Modesty against Lust and so on. It is a short step from these works to the Morality plays *Everyman* and *Mankind*, to Langland's Lady Meed and Holy Church, and to Bunyan's Christian and Giant Despair in *The Pilgrim's Progress.* Bunyan's naming of characters such as Mr Holy-Man or Mr Valiant-for-Truth coincided with the Puritan adoption of such sententious and biblical names for individuals (Coates 2006: 322; Valiant-for-Truth is from Jer. 9: 3). But equally, Bunyan may have been instrumental in undermining these patterns of naming since the majory of such names in his work relate to negative traits, as in Mr Facing-bothways, Mrs Love-the-flesh and Mr Worldly-Wiseman (Sharrock 1966).

The tendency towards typification in Middle English literature may be briefly illustrated. Alisoun seems to have been the name of the typical attractive woman: the lover's fancy turns from all women to one so named in the lyric-burden 'An hendy hap ich habbe ihent' (Davies 1963: 67); it is also the name of the attractive carpenter's wife in Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*, and of Chaucer's Wife of Bath and her close friend. Its etymology appears to be 'nobility' (Continental Germanic *Adalheidis*) and this, together with its adoption through French, adds a courtly gloss to the name. Part of the humour of its use in Chaucer derives from the rather uncourtly behaviour of the bearers of the name. By contrast, much of the fun in the medieval Morality plays comes from the licence that the names of the Vices permits: in *Mankind*, for example, Mischief, Newguise, Nowadays, Nought and Titivillus are boisterous and mocking (Lester 1981). The last of these, Titivillus, as a collector of linguistic trifles and bad Latin (Latin *titivillitium* 'trifle, insignificant thing') is ironically the focus of a macaronic lyric (Davies 1963: 198), and is given all kinds of scurrilous and irreverent jests in *Mankind* and in the Towneley play of the *Last Judgement*.

Langland's *Piers Plowman* is populated by various personifications including the Seven Deadly Sins, Wit, Reason, Conscience and others. Its alliterative verse shows the linguistic pull of typification. In the C-text, Passus XI 211–232 (Skeat 1888), there is a brief discussion the process of transmission of Original Sin by procreation. The name of Cain, the son of Adam and Eve, is mentioned six times, and in four of those cases there is also the adjective *cursed* 212, 218, 226, 228); two of the examples relate the curse to Cain directly, the other two to humankind and Cain's bloodline. The alliteration in the line associates the name with the curse both directly and indirectly. The A- and B-texts at this point also have the phrase *Caymes kynde* ('Cain's kin', Passus X 149, Passus IX 119, respectively), and this complex of associations echoes in alliterative verse back to *Beowulf*, where it is reported that Grendel was cursed through his descent from Cain, when the Creator *forscrifen hæfde / in Caines cynne* ('had cursed [him] in the kin of Cain', Fulk et al. 2008: 106b–107a). One of the more subtle developments in *Piers Plowman* is in the nature of the eponymous character. Piers (the name is a variant of Peter) appears initially as an honest working man, but mystically becomes identified with St Peter (the Rock on which the Church is built, Mat. 16: 18, an identification that implicitly questioned the authority of the Pope) and even subsequently with Christ himself (Skeat 1888: I, xxvi–v) by the common exegesis of I Cor. 10: 4 (e.g. in Isidore, Barney et al. 2006: 168).

Cratylic naming is not the only pattern in Middle English literature however. In a recent study, Jane Bliss has analysed medieval romances and discerns a predominantly Hermogenean mode: she writes, 'romance does not, on the whole, want to know what the name means' (Bliss 2008: 26). Indeed, in a playful and knowing fashion, romance writers divest names of significance, as Libeaus Desconus ('The Fair Unkown') becomes a name (Sir Thefair) rather than a description, as does Dégaré ('Lost'), as Bliss shows. In the romance tradition the timing of the disclosure of the name is more important than the name itself. In

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, the Green Knight reveals himself as Sir Bertilak de Hautdesert only after Gawain has failed in his test at the end of the story (Andrew and Waldron 2007: line 2445). And while the names might have Cratylic significance, the narrative has been able to maintain the namelessness of the lord of the castle and his lady, and emphasise the greenness of the Green Knight through the text: they are, despite occasional appearances of ordinariness, predominantly 'other', there to test Gawain.

The fourteenth-century poem *Pearl* sits neatly between Boethius and Bunyan, as it is a dream-vision concerned with questions of suffering. In the dream, a beatified girl appears to, and discusses Christian doctrine with an unnamed man. Most readers interpret the characters in the poem to be a bereaved father whose two-year-old daughter has died, and who now appears to him in her heavenly form (Andrew and Waldron 2007: 14). In the dream she interprets to him gospel parables about salvation and the biblical book of Revelation (the Apocalypse), to teach him about how he may attain to the place where she now is, the New Jerusalem, that visionary place described by John in the New Testament, and to which Christian in the *Pilgrim's Progress* also journeys. The poem is shot through with images and associations of pearls: the girl wears a crown of pearls and a splendid one adorns her breast; she is of pearly whiteness and purity; the value of pearls to princes and jewellers is explored; and biblical references to the parable of the 'pearl of great price' (Mat. 13: 45–6) and the 'pearly gates' of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21: 21) are developed. The very structure of the poem, with its 101 stanzas linked by keywords, with the keyword of the last line repeating the first, suggests the endless perfection and roundness of the pearl, or a string of pearls.

A central subtlety of the poem is that it is not entirely clear, but likely, that the girl's name was Pearl or Margaret, and thus the poem engages in name-riddling. The dreamer twice addresses the girl thus:

'O perle,' quod I, 'in perleȝ pyȝt,

Art þou my perle þat I haf playned ...' (lines 241–2)

('O Pearl/pearl,' I said, 'arrayed in pearls:

Are you my Pearl/pearl, whom I have mourned ...?')

and

'O perle,' quod I, 'of rych renoun ...' (line 1182)

('O Pearl/pearl,' I said, 'of rich fame...')

The poet also gives the Anglicised Latin term *margary* (and variants, from *margarita* 'pearl') three times, making it possible that Margery or Margaret was the girl's name. Thus the poet plays with almost infinite inventiveness with the Cratylic significance of the name: he makes her, or the pearl, symbolise the Christian, salvation, heaven, treasure, and more, as well as being a child with a childlike didacticism. Most works of the typifying or allegorical kind do not achieve the sense of personality that the poet achieves in this poem in both the dreamer and the maiden. The middle part of the poem is a vehicle for an exposition of the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Mat. 20: 1–16), to be sure, but the dreamer and the maiden interact in the rest of the poem in almost natural ways, and neither of them becomes an abstraction.

The tendency towards allegory, personification, and typification in Middle English can be seen in works of the major authors and in figural narrative. The predominant didacticism of the period found extreme Cratylic naming a useful and widely-understood mode of signification. Of course there is literature from this period that may not reflect these patterns: there is Hermogenean realism in naming as well, deployed in the romances and elsewhere. The cases discussed above, however, show that skill in characterisation and a sensitivity to nuance do not let the meanings of names overpower action and characterisation.

25.5 Shakespeare and the Early Modern Period

Shakespeare's names have been the subject of much study, and with good reason. Laurie Maguire has a chapter exploring the onomastic background and evidencing the delight that Shakespeare took in playing with names (2007: 10–49). It is progressively harder to generalise about literary onomastic approaches after the Middle Ages, but Shakespeare's names tend to have an intertextual freight. In *Twelfth Night* (c. 1600) there are the appropriately-named comic characters, the riotous Sir Toby Belch and the feeble Sir Andrew Aguecheek. The joyous Clown, Feste, is named in the dramatis personae but only once in the play. Like these, Malvolio's name is clearly Cratylic, meaning 'ill-will', but as a character he is more than slightly reminiscent of Malevole in Marston's approximately contemporary *The Malcontent* (published 1604, but probably produced earlier): both characters intend to usurp a higher place than is theirs by right, though Malevole is guileful while Malvolio is both gullible and sententious. In the baiting of Malvolio, Feste pretends to be Sir Topas, a curate: the name might refer to Chaucer's vacuous *Tale of Sir Thopas*, or to the lunatic-healing properties of topaz found in Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* of 1584 (Levith 1978: 91; Lothian and Craik 1975: 120–21); but perhaps additionally in a lapidary tradition evidenced in *The Pearl* (Andrew and Waldron 2007: line 1012) and Batman's encyclopedia (Batman 1582: Book XVI chapter 96), the topaz 'hath two coulours', as Feste has two voices and refers repeatedly to light and darkness and various philosophical ambiguities.

Shakespeare looked to Holinshed and Spenser and perhaps Geoffrey of Monmouth for the history, and the old play of *King Leir* for some of the drama, of his *King Lear*. But he added the sub-plot with Edgar and Edmund. Shakespeare popularised the name Cordelia: Holinshed spelt it Cordeilla, and in Spenser it was Cordeill or Cordelia (Smith 1909: Book II Canto X). As Coates notes (2006: 322), the feminine name type ending <-(i)a> originated in predominantly classical sources and this might have motivated the change Spenser initiated and Shakespeare continued. The theory embraced by Foakes and originating in Anderson was

that Cordelia was based on '"Cor" from Greek for the heart, and "delia" an anagram of ideal' (Foakes 1997: 31, 155).[3] Anderson, with greater linguistic accuracy, suggested Latin *cor, cordis* as the etymon of the first element and proposed that 'If Shakespeare was aware of *Delia* as an anagram for *ideal*, this meaning might further have a influenced his choosing of the form' (1987: 7). Though Shakespeare was doubtless aware of the name Delia, for example from the title of Samuel Daniel's 1592 collection of sonnets *Delia*, the posited anagram of *ideal* is unlikely. With the sense 'supremely excellent of its kind', and usually spelt *ideall*, the word is first recorded as a 'hard word' in the second edition of Cawdrey's *Table Alphabeticall* of 1609 (OED: *ideal*, adj. 2),[4] and it is unlikely that Shakespeare anagrammatised a word not yet widely familiar when he was working on the play in 1605–6. He might have thought of Delia as the name of a 'sweet maide' with a strong streak of intransigence, such as Daniels addresses in his verse; but it might have been simply the classical-sounding polysyllable that appealed.

The sub-plot and its names appear to have been Shakespeare's invention. The historical Edgar (king 959–75), Foakes notes, was 'a famous hero but also noted for cruelty', and Edmund was the name of the 'King of East Anglia from 841, who was reputed as a hero and as a saint' (1997: 155). It is unclear why the name of the Machiavellian Edmund in the play should refer to the East Anglian saint. A closer reading of Holinshed reveals a potentially more plausible reference. King Athelstan (Adelstane in Holinshed), 925–39, was succeeded by his brother Edmund (king 939–46), whose son was Edgar (Holinshed 1577: 5.92 f). Athelstan was reputedly a bastard (ibid: 5.92); Edmund was a warrior; and Edgar was a peaceable and judicious king. The essential details that fed Shakespeare's dramatic imagination can thus be found in two main passages of Holinshed's first volume: the Leir chapters of Book 3 (1577: 5.18) and the chapters relating to the Saxon kings (1577: 5.92 f). Shakespeare conflated the Saxon brothers to arrive at a bastard Edmund and made Edgar

Edmund's younger brother. Doubtless this conflation of Leir, whose reign began according to Holinshed in 'the yeare of the world 3105' (approximately 899 BCE), and the reign of Edgar in 'the yeere of our Lord God 959', is as anachronistic as Gloucester's reference to 'spectacles'. But Shakespeare's imaginative grasp of history shaped his writing of *King Lear* and it is the names that locate the play in this transhistorical and intertextual context.[5]

In *The Winter's Tale*, Perdita 'Lost' is an obvious Cratylic name. Shakespeare changes the names of the main characters in the play from his source, the romance of *Pandosto* by Robert Greene (Pafford 1963: 181–225). Greene's Pandosto and Fawnia become Shakespeare's Leontes and Perdita. Leontes entertains a delusion that his daughter was conceived in adultery, and in a parody of baptismal naming, the child is handed over to Antigonus to be disposed of or 'lost', but instead is given a name by curious means. Hermione appears in a dream to Antigonus and names the child, before he exits 'pursued by a bear' and dies:

> and, for the babe
> Is counted lost for ever, Perdita,
> I prithee call't. (3. 3. 32–4)

The baby Perdita is then found by a shepherd who preserves the name which he could not know. The choice of the name Perdita, and the implausible way it is given, put a good deal of dramatic emphasis on the name. By the mid-point of the play, Leontes believes his daughter and his wife Hermione to be dead. In the dénouement of the final scene years later, both wife and daughter are restored, apparently from death. 'Our Perdita is found' (5. 3. 121), says Paulina, and Polixenes remarks (in a cluster of references to life and death) that somehow Hermione has been 'stolen from the dead' (115).

The lost is found and the dead is alive again. The contemporary audience would have recognised the echo of the parable of the Prodigal Son from Luke 15: 11–32. The Prodigal

wastes his inheritance, then returns to his father in desperation; his father welcomes him back, ordering a celebration, 'For,' he says, 'this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found' (Luke 15: 24). This biblical story is mentioned in the play in Act 4 scene 3 by Autolycus. Using the device of the name Perdita, Shakespeare makes play with the parable: this drama is about a prodigal father, who loses his wife and daughter through his baseless jealousy. But through undeserved grace, the lost is found and the dead restored to life. The themes of sin, repentance and restoration from the parable are re-focused in the play.[6]

Early Modern literature inherits the literary onomastic devices of earlier traditions and develops its own. There is the persistent echo of the Bible, but in addition there are plausible intertextual references to encyclopedic and historical literature, to contemporary romance and verse.

25.6 Later Modern literature

In the modern period there have been many studies of names in novels. While the list of Dickens' Cratylic names—amusing, associative, punning— is long, Dickens is perhaps the most extreme example of a trend in the modern period. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* borrows its title from Bunyan, and its heroine Becky Sharp is indeed sharp. Trollope's Mr Quiverful has, as has been observed, many children. Perhaps more subtly, Jane Austen might be suggesting provinciality with the names Morland ('wasteland') and Thorpe ('minor estate') as against the well-to-do culture of the town of Tilney in Norfolk in *Northanger Abbey*; or the French aristocratic pedigree of Darcy and Lady Catherine de Burgh as against the good fortune of the Bennets (Latin *benedictus* 'blessed') in *Pride and Prejudice*. Certainly in Austen's novels, visitors to Bath are immersed in the maelstrom of society taking the waters, for good or ill: some drown, others emerge cleansed or even healed.

There is space for one final variation on Cratylic naming. Alastair Fowler has discussed the 'georgic' name Hodge, 'which seems to have been the early modern type-name for a rustic or agricultural labourer' (2012: 30), and he cites a range of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources. Thomas Hardy, whose character Angel Clare in *Tess of the Durbervilles* finds no trace of 'the pitiable dummy known as Hodge' after a few days living among country people, apparently resented the caricature. This then gives significance to Hardy's choice of the name of 'Drummer Hodge' in his poem about the Boer War (Gibson 1976: 90–91). Hodge, the (onomastic) yokel, becomes detached from his familiar locality and becomes part of a landscape utterly remote: he is buried by a 'kopje-crest' in 'the Bush', presided over by 'strange-eyed constellations'. This Hodge is no localised country bumpkin, but at home in a wide and mysterious universe. The naming in the poem is anti-Cratylic.

25.7 Conclusion

As yet no great onomastic imagination has been exercised on the titles of books dealing with literary onomastics: for example, there are two *Names in Literature* (Alvarez-Altman and Burelbach 1987, and Ashley 2003) and one *Literary Names* (Fowler 2012). Yet literary onomastics is a vibrant discipline embracing an enormous range of analytic topics (Alvarez-Altman 1981) and artistic approaches (Smith 2005). The thrust of this essay has not been to enumerate but to illustrate. It has suggested that early English literary onomastics depends linguistically on etymology (including folk- or Isidorean etymology), association, and name-riddling. In the Middle English period we see typification, personification and allegory as dominant modes. The early Modern period, insofar as generalisation is useful, makes extensive use of onomastic echo and borrowing to locate names in an intertextual nexus. And later literary onomastics inherits nearly everything from the earlier periods and uses it in a variety of ways, including the anti-Cratylic.

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[1] A similar point is made by Karina van Dalen-Oskam (2005) who writes, 'We can only determine the singularity of an author, oeuvre, genre, time or cultural area when we know what is really to be regarded as normal.'

[2] Faith, Hope and Charity continue as personal names, for example; Spenser has these characters romantically dressed *The Faerie Queene* as Fidelia, Speranza and Charissa (Smith 1909: Book 1 Canto X).

[3] Levith's suggestion for the second element is Greek *delos* 'revealed' (1978: 57).

[4] The only antecedent sense is the Platonic one, 'an idea or archetype', not relevant here.

[5] Fowler (2012: 117–8) suggests that Shakespeare might have been playing on Camden's etymology of the names, but I think the historical associations are more significant here.

[6] Groves (2007: 186–7) points to the *Noli me tangere* theme in the final scene, also echoing the biblical tradition. The *Winter's Tale* analogy above was proposed in Cavill 2011.